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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 001545

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TAGS: PGOV KDEM AG
SUBJECT: FLN OFFICIALS STATE THEIR PRIORITIES

REF: ALGIERS 1259

Classified By: DCM Thomas F. Daughton for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Two senior officials in the National Liberation Front (FLN), Algeria's predominant political party, reviewed the party's near-term priorities for us on August 29. Their top goal is implementation of President Bouteflika's Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation. Second is supporting Bouteflika's upcoming proposal on amending the Algerian constitution. The party's other priorities focus on the electoral process in 2007. The FLN has begun discussions with other Algerian political parties on updating and reforming the electoral law with the goal of balancing greater democracy with the needs of political parties. They hope the reforms will pave the way for the FLN to gain additional parliamentary seats in May 2007 national legislative elections. END SUMMARY.

Implementing the Charter

¶2. (SBU) FLN communications director Said Bouhadja and FLN steering committee member Mourad Lamoudi told us that the party was most focused on two aspects of Charter implementation. First, they said, it intended to support whatever decision President Bouteflika (who is also FLN honorary president) made on extending the August 28 deadline for armed terrorists to surrender and disarm. The FLN leaders believed it was wrong to second-guess any decision Bouteflika might make to extend the deadline into or past Ramadan. As the president of the country, they asserted, he alone could balance competing interests and decide what was best for Algeria. A second issue of immediate concern to the FLN was making sure that families of the victims of terrorism were fully compensated for their losses, in accordance with the Charter. The party was not pleased with the pace of the payments, which are controlled at the wilaya (provincial) level, and was using its good offices to speed up the disbursements.

¶3. (SBU) The FLN representatives briefed us in detail on the party's proposed constitutional changes (reftel), acknowledging that other political parties and organizations had provided their own input to Bouteflika. While the FLN obviously supported its own proposal, they said, Bouteflika would certainly take elements of the several proposals he had received and present a package that was completely his to the Algerian people for approval by referendum. Regardless of what Bouteflika's proposal contained, the FLN would vigorously support it, according to our interlocutors.

Talking to Other Parties about the Electoral Law

¶4. (C) Bouhadja confirmed press reports that FLN party leader (and Prime Minister) Belkhadem had met with his counterpart at the opposition Islamic political party Islah (Reform). He said the highest levels of the FLN were determined to work hand-in-glove with other political parties in Algeria to revamp the electoral law prior to May 2007 national legislative elections. Islah's Djaballah was a natural ally, we were told, because he had serious concerns about the compilation and use of party lists at the ballot box. The FLN believed the party lists, which virtually guaranteed the election of the names at the top, were less than democratic and failed to reward individual candidates who brought votes to the ticket. While there was utility in keeping party lists in some form, changes needed to be made. The FLN wanted to coordinate with the other parties in making those changes. The two FLN representatives would not divulge how many of Algeria's 64 officially registered political parties the FLN would approach, but it was clear that all parties with representation in parliament would be consulted. Further, they stressed, that consultation was meant to be collegial rather than confrontational.

¶5. (SBU) The FLN is committed to expanding its already overwhelming control of the national parliament in the May 2007 elections, we were told. To this end, the party had done much to revitalize and strengthen its base. Our interlocutors said the FLN was the most democratic of the Algerian political parties at the lower levels, and that the party's leadership strove to draw on that strong base of support to recruit the very best candidates. A series of local FLN elections, the modalities of which had not been

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fully decided, would determine the eventual composition of the party's national slate of candidates. Unlike the other Algerian political parties, they said, the FLN slate would include at least 25 percent women.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: We are encouraged by the FLN's privately sharing with us its desire to be collegial in approaching other Algerian political parties about electoral reform. It strikes us as a good exercise in democracy, even though we expect the parties will not find it easy to reach a consensus on what changes are need to election laws in advance of the May elections.

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